

Howard County Consumer Affairs Advisory Board Meeting Minutes for April 6, 2016

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm.

- Present: Sue Rogan, Katherine Bronstein, Felicia West, Jill Bussey
- Absent: Jerome Jackson, Ashlyn Hood, Richard Green

Minutes of the February meeting were approved as read.

Greeting of Guests: Two guests were in attendance at the meeting:

- Marshall McLeod, who has submitted his application to become a Board member. He was attending to get more information on what the Board does and what his responsibilities would be if he is appointed.
- County Councilperson Mary Kay Sigaty attended to discuss potential landlord-tenant legislation (described below).

Discussion of Potential Landlord-Tenant legislation

Mary Kay Sigaty advised the Board that she is considering County legislation relating to several landlord tenant issues brought to her attention by a constituent. Ms. Sigaty is asking the Office of Law to look into the County's ability to enact legislation in this area. Her staff is also looking into what other jurisdictions have done. Becky, along with representatives of related Departments (DILP, Department of Housing and Housing Commission) had previously met with Ms. Sigaty to discuss the problems raised by her constituent and other problem areas that may exist. At that meeting, Becky suggested that it would be helpful for Ms. Sigaty to get input from tenants and landlords across the County, and noted that the Consumer Advisory Board's duties and responsibilities include the ability to make recommendations on any matter related to consumer protection and to hold public hearings as deemed necessary for the purpose of forming recommendations on the inclusion or exclusion of persons or organizations from provisions of the County Code.

Ms. Sigaty was, therefore, asking the Board to consider what, if any, role it would like to play in obtaining feedback from both landlords and tenants in the County. The Board briefly discussed some ideas including: seeking feedback from related boards and commissions (e.g. Commission on Aging, Commission on Disabilities, Commission on Human Rights, the Women's Commission, etc.); conducting "focus groups" at County 50+ Centers; holding public meetings of landlords and tenants (together or separately); and conducting surveys.

The Board agreed that members would think about these ideas and the resources needed to carry them out, and discuss them further at the next meeting. Ms. Sigaty said that she would get information on other jurisdictions' landlord-tenant laws and a list of her ideas to the Board by its June meeting. Meanwhile, Jill asked if there are statistics on the increase/decrease of the rental market in the County and if there is information breaking down those numbers into types of rental housing (multi-unit buildings, single family homes, etc). Becky said that she would look into this and report back at the next meeting. Becky will also provide the Board with information about the types of landlord-tenant questions and complaints OCA has received in the last couple of years.

Evaluation of the Student Loan Forum and Resource Fair

Becky provided the Board with information collected from the evaluations completed by the Forum's audience (33 evaluations from approximately 150 attendees). Of particular note:

- Many of the surveys suggested that the program be repeated but earlier in the year (between November and March) since FASFA forms must be submitted in early March.
- Some of the surveys suggested that future events focus be on students looking for funds to go to college, while others suggested that future events focus on information for students who have already incurred student loan debt.

The Board discussed these comments along with some ideas for a similar event, including:

- Holding the event in early November (before the due date for FASFAs and before bad weather is likely to affect attendance)
- Holding an event with 2 sessions – one with information for new students and the other with information for those with student loan debt – so that attendees could attend the session that is of most interest or both;
- Holding the event on a weekend day;
- Setting up the event as a webinar;

The Board decided to consider these issues and to discuss again at the next meeting. The Board will also consider whether there are sufficient resources for it to gather landlord tenant information while planning for another event.

Discussion of Advisory Board By-Laws

Becky distributed the Board's By-laws to the Board. While these By-laws are in compliance with County Code requirements, the Board agreed that it would be good to review them for needed updates. Jill volunteered to do this but indicated that this may take several months to complete.

Department of Citizen Services Reorganization

Becky advised the Board that DCS Director Phyllis Madachy has asked to come to an upcoming meeting to discuss the upcoming reorganization of DCS and the direction of the Department. The Board asked Becky to ask Ms. Madachy if she could attend the June meeting since the agenda for May would be very full.

Other business

Given the number of matters on May's agenda, the Board members present thought it might be preferable to start the May meeting at 6:30 instead of 7. Becky will poll all members, and if there is consensus, advise all members and post a notification on OCA's website.

Upcoming Events:

- Howard County Housing Fair, April 9, 10 am to 3 pm at Howard High School. Becky will participate in a landlord-tenant workshop as well as staff the OCA information table
- Money Matters Fair, April 24, 11am to 2 pm at Wilde Lake High School. Investigator Lila Boor will give a presentation on ID Theft and Scams and will staff the OCA information table

Meeting adjourned at 8:17 pm.

THE NEXT MEETING OF THE BOARD WILL BE HELD ON MAY 4, TIME TO BE DETERMINED
OFFICE OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS CONFERENCE ROOM
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